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# International Developments Regarding Professional Laws and Regulations of Social Work Profession

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International Federation of Social Workers

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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COVID-19 has shifted what society deems as essential work

‘essential was considered those who maintained critical infrastructure and continue critical services and functions’

Social workers have been  
designated essential workers throughout  
Covid-19

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# THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RECOGNITION ARE CRUCIAL

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Acknowledgment and Recognition = Quality Job Performance

Social workers experience higher levels of organisational support for implementing common practice / universal minimum quality standards.

Change in policies including workplace safety measures.

The recognition of social care needs impacts public health's ability to address health-related issues.

# PROFESSIONAL REGULATION PROTECTS THE PUBLIC INTEREST

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## Example

FINLAND / National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health

*Social worker is a licensed profession in Finland. Only licensed professionals are allowed to practise the profession in question.*

The European countries now provide social work qualifications in universities as a form of higher education.

# WHAT IS A REGULATED PROFESSION?

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As a general rule, a profession is regulated if you have to hold a specific degree to access the profession, sit special exams such as state exams and/or register with a professional body.

EXAMPLE / SWEDEN:

Regulated professions – professions with specific requirements, regulated through Swedish legislation that defines the requirements for working within that profession, a particular qualification or other formal recognition.

## WHY WE HAVE DIVERSITY?

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Across the European region, social welfare models differ as a result of varying political systems and economic development.

Thus, there is a diversity of social welfare systems, and there are differences in the training, employment, organization, regulation, and deployment of social workers in these systems.

# OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

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This European social work identity is recognized in a formal decision of the Council of Europe (2001) on the role of social workers, which remains the broadest, official statement about the role of social work in the European context.

## COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

**Recommendation Rec(2001)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states  
on social workers**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 January 2001 at the 737th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

LINK: [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016804d6030](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016804d6030)



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# OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

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*Recognising that the nature of professional social work demands the highest level of responsibility in decision-making and mature judgement on the part of social workers and that consistently high standards of competence, therefore, require appropriate education and professional training;*

*It is timely to provide a renewed European framework of principles for the effective education, training, practice and working conditions of social workers and to make recommendations to member states on actions they should take to support social workers in fulfilling their essential responsibilities.*

**Recommends governments of member states to take the following action:**

**a. provide a stable legal framework within which social workers can practise;**

LINK: [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016804d6030](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016804d6030)



## DO WE SHARE A COMMON GROUND?

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The EU has a strong belief in the "European social model", but there is disagreement about what it means in practice.

In 2015, the Commission found that “the most resilient countries have labour market and welfare institutions that promote social fairness and contribute to recovery and growth” (European Commission, 2015).

# OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

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The employment of social workers across borders is subject to the Professional Qualifications Directive (European Union, 2005).

The Commission published a study evaluating the Professional Qualifications Directive against recent educational reforms in EU Member States including significant references to the impact on social work (e.g., para 2.2.5).

## WHAT IS THE DEBATE ABOUT?

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It is recognised that Social workers have a unique skill set.

The major debate is not about whether social workers or social services are needed but rather how they can be provided most effectively and economically.

# OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

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Directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011L0024>

Communication from the Commission - Implementing the Community Lisbon programme - Social services of general interest in the European Union {SEC(2006) 516} /\* COM/2006/0177 final \*/

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0177:FIN:EN:HTML>

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## ILO / INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATION

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ISCO is a framework that organizes jobs into a clearly defined set of groups according to the tasks and duties undertaken in the job.

Social Work profession is listed in ISCO.

Link: <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco88/2446.htm>

# WHY DO WE NEED TO PROTECT THE TITLE OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION?

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Protecting the public interest is the most significant reason for regulating social work practice through setting the standards of professional and ethical conduct.

In establishing a code of practice, a profession acknowledges its responsibility to ensure that the actions of its professionals promote safety and integrity, thus fostering public trust.

# WHY DO WE NEED TO PROTECT THE TITLE OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION?

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Ensure that state legislation includes standards for social workers to practice the profession at the highest level of their knowledge and skills.

This includes exercising professional judgment, professional integrity, respect of professional values, transparency and accountability.

# WHY DO WE NEED TO PROTECT THE TITLE OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION?

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Public confidence

Title protection and regulating social work practice maintain public confidence in social workers and social service workers because people know they are receiving services from trained, competent and accountable professionals.



## AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL? OR PROVINCE LEVEL?

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IFSW, along with the European Council and the EU, advocates for approving a national law which protects the title of social worker profession.

Regulations are standards enforced by government through national legislation which is developed in cooperation with the professional association of social workers and social workers trade unions.

Ensure a national level of legislation across provinces to enhance consistency and maintain high standards.

## **IN WHICH WAYS COULD A LAW CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL WORK QUALITY AND TO FULFILLING ITS AIMS?**

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**Social workers are found in every aspect of community life, including schools, hospitals, mental health clinics, child welfare, services for victims of domestic violence, healthcare providers, emergency services, disaster management, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, hospice programs, substance abuse treatment centers, family service agencies (.....)**

# IN WHICH WAYS COULD A LAW CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL WORK QUALITY AND TO FULFILLING ITS AIMS?

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## EXAMPLE

Social work is an integral component of the health care system

Identifying the historical roots of health inequity and how social workers contribute to solving intractable healthcare challenges.

Empower people to make informed decisions about challenging health issues and connect them with vital resources that promote health and well-being.

## IN WHICH WAYS COULD A LAW CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL WORK QUALITY AND TO FULFILLING ITS AIMS?

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### EXAMPLE - Romania

Social work is an integral component of the health care system

Ministry of the Interior, Department for Emergency Situations, requested the Association of Social Workers from Romania (ASproAS) to develop working procedures for social workers working in emergency reception units in hospitals.

The procedures were approved as secondary legislation by the Department of Emergency Situations and sent to all hospitals for mandatory implementation.

These procedures are now part of hospital management standards.

# IN WHICH WAYS COULD A LAW CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL WORK QUALITY AND TO FULFILLING ITS AIMS?

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## EXAMPLE - Romania

Social workers are the leaders in assisting victims of domestic violence

The Ministry of Social Affairs approved as legislation the minimum quality standards in the field of support for domestic violence victims.

As a result of the increase in cases of domestic violence and the inability to respond to the needs of the victims, the Ministry of Social Affairs decided to approve the minimum standards in which the social worker is the intervention leader, and the work practices are brought from the portfolio of the social worker profession (...).

# IS IT NECESSARY FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO INVOLVE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAWS?

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Without the social work professional input on laws, social workers might encounter circumstances in which legal standards conflict with the profession's ethical standards.

# IS IT NECESSARY FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO INVOLVE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LAWS?

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To practice effectively and ethically, social workers need a working environment that upholds ethical practice and commits to quality standards.

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I know that the Austrian Association of Social Workers OBDS is fighting and advocating for professional law since 1997.

I wish you success and assure you of the support of the International Federation of Social Workers.

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH!**

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